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CIA Alliances: Purists Versus Interventionists

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Secretary of State George P. Shultz's timing could not have been worse last month. He appeared before the Senate the day after Seymour M. Hersh, in the New York Times, revealed that the United States had given information on the African National Congress to the South African government. When called on the congressional carpet, Shultz told the senators that he had talked to William J. Casey, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, who had flatly denied the allegation. There it rests, another one-day wonder in the torpor of an unusually hot Washington summer.

The story did stir up questions about U.S. intelligence ties with other governments. There are such ties but a former CIA operations officer may refer to them only generally. A government that may be quite happy to deal with the CIA might still prefer that the question not be raised publicly.

Every liaison between the CIA and a foreign intelligence or security service is different. Nonetheless, the connection is usually consistent with the formal relations between the United States and the other government. The CIA does not invent alliances. A liaison in intelligence may follow in the wake of diplomatic relations. It may not. Normal *pro forma* diplomatic relations or, say, a desire for commerce, are conventional motives for an exchange of embassies. There may be no such common interest for an exchange in the intelligence field.

Thus, national policy defines the role of the CIA. The Alliance for Progress in Latin America in the 1960s illustrates this. One aim of the alliance was to hamper Cuban subversion in the Americas. Some Latin countries were pretty sleepy about security. (But not all: Beware the sweeping generalization about Latin America.) In some countries the police served the narrow interests of those in power, smelling out domestic opposition to the in-group, stumbling right past the Cuban and Soviet intelligence operations going on under their noses.

To a certain turn of practical mind, arrest and torture are convenient ways of dealing with the opposition. The measures appear effective in the short term and the perpetrators do not seem to realize that brutality is, at best, politically unattractive. The CIA was told to try to change this face of the police just as the Agency for International Development's public safety program was set up to train the police in other disciplines. Persuading police officials to collect information within a framework of civil rights, leading them to concentrate on real enemies of constitutional government rather than on the political outs—that was the approach.

This was no mere technical mission but rather one of diplomacy. To be effective, the CIA could not blow into town and deliver the canned U.S. sermon on human rights. If it did not want the door to police headquarters slammed on its foot, the CIA had tactfully to lead the duller officers to tolerate new ways. The brighter ones were eager to build a force they could be proud of—even if it meant putting up with a certain amount of foreign meddling.

Often the advice was least heeded where most needed. Hard to generalize: In many countries the CIA, as did the AID program, left behind enduring good will that developed from working on common tasks. Working closely but quietly with these governments to modify bad practices was probably as effective as putting them in a public pillory for violating human rights—some would say more so. (With this history, the charge that the CIA was mixed up with torture in Latin America is peculiarly galling to CIA veterans. There was a certain grim amusement to be found in the notion that Latin American policemen needed advice on techniques of torture.)

Weak career bureaucracies are a worldwide problem, not only in Latin America. The police suffer as much as any other government service if a new crop of political hacks moves in on professional levels with every change of regime. The ban on training of police forces—a short-sighted residue of the birth of wrong-headed righteousness in Washington in the mid-1970s—was a blow to this continuity of experience.

Purists within the CIA itself have objected to the CIA's involvement in such country-building activities, a term they use derisively for this expensive diversion of CIA talent. The CIA should stick to the serious work of espionage and counterespionage. No one else is capable of doing these highly specialized tasks, purists argue: Why should the CIA do the State Department's work? Some of these same purists disliked the CIA's being involved in the war in Southeast Asia—in their view another diversion from essential work. No wonder there isn't better coverage of the Soviet Union, they would say. If there was an intelligence job needed in Vietnam, let the Army do it. But these decisions are not always made by the professionals. Presidents of the United States get testy at what seem to be parochial concerns. They want the job done by those best able to do it.

To even more extreme purists, any CIA relation with another government is harmful to the integrity of CIA's own work. Such CIA officers may look down on colleagues who work in liaison with another government. People in liaison are a lesser breed, lacking the aggressive, hard-charging talents needed in CIA's own work: Thus speaks the unilateral faction. The CIA people working in liaison are scornfully accused of taking on the coloration of the foreign service they deal with, of forgetting who they work for, of "being in bed with the Transylvanians," or with whomever they are working.

Probably this isolationist sentiment hangs on even with a new generation of intelligence officers. If so, it's too bad. There are immense benefits to the United States from being in touch with other intelligence services. Some intelligence professionals argue that information of most importance to the United States has often come from other intelligence services. Such notions—probably too subjective to prove or disprove—enrage the purist even if he does grudgingly admit that maybe here or there is another decent intelligence service.

A common question, that: Who has the best intelligence service? Some say the Israelis, some the British, some the KGB. The question is entertaining but there is no pat answer. Mind, there are not many top-notch services. A common appurtenance of prestige is a national airline. As expensive as that is, it is easier to keep it flying than to maintain a good intelligence service. Like a university, at any one time an intelligence service has some good departments and some weak ones. The faculties differ in morale and competence. So, the question should be: Is the intelli-

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gence service serious? Does it represent its own country's interests? What is the advantage in dealing with it?

The CIA's discreet communications channels are used for other purposes than relaying information from another intelligence service—strange ones, sometimes. For instance, in the 1970s more than one CIA officer in country X was startled by a message through CIA channels telling him personally to deliver a message to the chief of state without letting the ambassador know. The invisible government? Not at all. A high White House official wanted to cut the Department of State out of the diplomatic picture. The motive was as often a simple love of deviousness and a particular distrust of the department. The CIA officer had to gulp and do it.

Sometimes it was the other way round. A foreign government might dislike an ambassador and want to deal through the CIA. If this became a habit it would bring on grand delusions for the CIA officer concerned and spawn grudges among State Department colleagues, vented later on quite innocent CIA officers. But an American ambassador might also find the CIA convenient. In more than one country with a leaky foreign office, ambassadors used CIA channels to get an important message to the chief of state.

The media are naturally drawn to the unconcealable paramilitary work—to the debate in Congress about Nicaragua—rather than to what is less visible. CIA relations with other governments are a channel for discreetly carrying out the more sensitive government tasks. The President of the United States is planning to visit country Y: What's security like? Who does the Secret Service deal with to assure his protection? The drug campaign in a certain country is going poorly: Which officials are corrupt? What might be done about it? A member of country Z's U.N. delegation in New York, is working for the KGB: Who should be told? What will they do about it?

People who don't like the CIA should be pleased, anyway, to know that it's hard on the CIA purists, too. The CIA is well plugged-in around the world. Presidents may come into office mistrusting the CIA. Some change their minds. Some misuse the CIA, others use it wisely. But all of the Presidents since World War II have found it handy. □

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